



# Discourses of Distressed Communities: Geographical Text Analysis and Poverty

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# Discourses of poverty

- 18-month ESRC-funded project
  - Ian Gregory, Tony McEnery, Laura Paterson (and Andrew Hardie)
- Corpus linguistics + CDA + GIS/GTA
- Source material:
  - 2010-2015 *Guardian* & *Daily Mail* articles
  - News, society, politics, (comment/editorial)
  - NOT sport, femail, holidays, promotions, etc.
- Focus: ***discourses of poverty in the UK media***

# Project aims



- To use Geographical Text Analysis (GTA) to investigate which place names in the UK are associated with poverty by the national press.
- To produce maps of the UK to visually represent the locations used by the press within discourses of poverty.
- To compare mass media coverage of locations associated with poverty, unemployment, and welfare receipt to official statistics taken from the UK Census.
- To use Critical Discourse Analysis to interrogate the similarities and differences between the statistical data and the corpus data.
- To demonstrate the viability of combining these different methodological approaches to facilitate the study of UK poverty (and social groups more widely).
- To provide an exemplar analysis in which GTA is used to shed new light on the way poverty is represented in the UK.

# Key initial questions

- Which places are mentioned in newspaper texts?
  - How frequently do such mentions occur?
  - Which locations are seldom, if ever, mentioned in the corpus?
- The size of places mentioned can be monitored and problematized:
  - Are cities referred to more than counties or towns?
  - Do place mentions correlate with population density?
- How are places referred to?
  - Are they homogenised?
  - Are they associated with particular topics of interest/news value and/or semantic fields?
  - Do representations of place change over time?
- How do media representations of place compare to official statistics?

# Geographical Text Analysis



- Geoparser:
  - Extracts all place names within +/- X words from the node (usually X = 10)
  - Assigns coordinates to each place name mentioned
- Geoparsed data is read into GIS (Geographical Information Systems) – database software that facilitates cartography
- Maps of the place name mentions are produced

all , much of it is not voluntary but forced by extreme [poverty](#) , natural disasters and wars . It would be a better world

them . There was scant material reparation for their sacrifices and so [poverty](#) , deep psychological stress and social displacement imprisoned their communities

sure work was always worthwhile . Recent cuts knock people back into [poverty](#) , with 4,000 cut from families on 17,000 , unless they can

widespread support for the idea of looking more broadly at what causes [poverty](#) , but warned against trying to compress social factors , such as

not let us down , and will be a beacon of Franciscan [poverty](#) and simplicity in a Vatican that still operates like a medieval court

people now forced to rely on food banks for sustenance , key [poverty](#) charities have warned in a report . Welfare changes and mistakes by

The answer , she said , " is partly to do with [poverty](#) in an absolute sense , although all the research shows ... black

government on child poverty and author of the report Delivering on child [poverty](#) : what would it take ? Clare Allan I've taken up

Nottingham because of a book I had found in the library : [Poverty](#) : The Forgotten Englishman , by Ken Coates and Bill Silburn -

million people on zero-hours contracts ; record numbers of people living in [poverty](#) ; and another 60bn in cuts still to be found before 2020

# Defining poverty

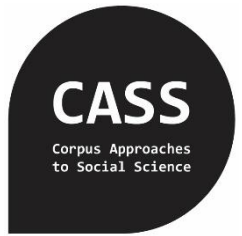
- ‘What poverty is taken to mean depends on who asks the question, how it is understood, and who responds’ (Chambers 2006:3)
- Implications for research:
  - one must understand how the selection of a particular definitions of poverty will act as a lens
  - one must survey a range of definitions of poverty and make a subjective decision about which to accept
  - one must question the social structures that facilitate non-poor people’s definitions of poverty and restrict the voices of those in poverty

# Measuring poverty

- Quantitative measurements:
  - Carstairs scores
  - Indices of Multiple Deprivation
  - Index of Local Conditions
- Proxy measurements
  - Unemployment
  - Social class
- Qualitative measurements
  - Standards of living
  - Emotional impacts

Poverty 'is (re)produced through discourse practices, most of which are enacted by groups with direct access to social, cultural and political power' (Lorenzo-Dus and Marsh 2012:275)

# Discourse and Place



- Discourse: language that encodes powerful, social, ideological structures and norms
  - ‘discourse is key to the reproduction and transformation of social identities, social relationships and systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough 1992: 64)’ (Jones et al. to appear)
- Discourses can be conceptually linked and draw upon each other: Race – Religion – Immigration –Poverty
- But they can also be proximally linked in geographical space
- Repeated discourses can be linked to real-world social/political change (e.g. policy changes)



# Discourse and Place II



- The location of (the production of) texts and the places they refer to can index powerful strategies
- Naming draws ‘attention to places’ whilst locating that place ‘in wider cultural narratives’ (Cresswell 2004:98)
- Places can be used to create us vs. them dichotomies

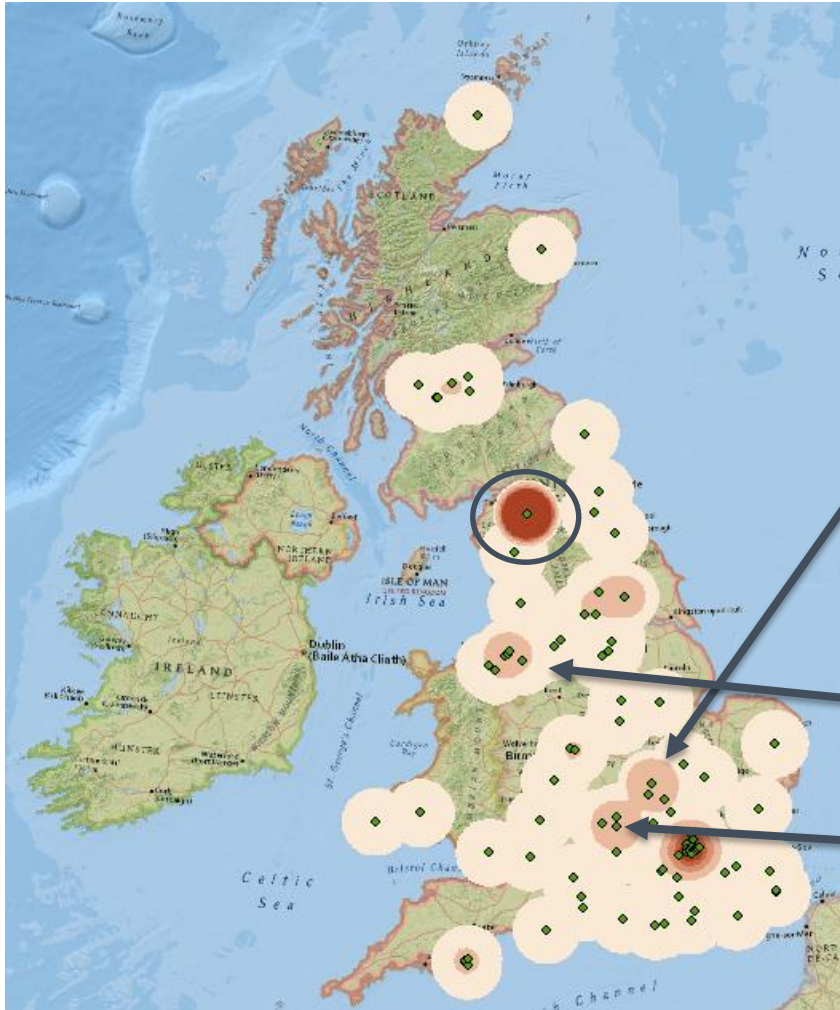
*‘Scotland votes no: the union has survived, but the questions for the left are profound’ (Kettle 2014)*

# Generating poverty keywords



- 7 *Daily Mail* articles + their (100+) BTL comments
- Original articles discuss UK poverty in terms of *benefits, income, children, pensioners, family*
- BTL comments included keywords such as *afford, pay, rent, wages, bankers, expensive, mortgage, dole, scrounger, council, MPs, feckless, children, cigarettes, TVs, smoke, mothers, JSA, redundant, Blair, vouchers, wealthy*

# The Next Steps



- *Poverty in the Guardian* (news 2010-15)
- Heat spots around Milton Keynes include references to 'England'
- The 'UK' also causes interference
- Heat spots around Liverpool (incl. *Liverpool, Birkenhead, Anfield*) and Oxford (incl. *Oxford, Oxfordshire, Whitney*) seem to be 'real'

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